



## Testimony by Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D. to the Education Committee

March 3, 2014

Good morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. As the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform, I strongly endorse Governor Malloy's universal preschool initiative. On today's agenda, there are two bills that will implement portions of this vital initiative. I will direct the majority of my comments to:

1. S.B. 25, "An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood" and
2. S.B. 26, "An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education."

CCER supports the intent of S.B. 25, "An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood" which will create a coordinated system of high-quality early childhood education in the state. Three requirements within the bill will help move this forward by:

1. Registering all day care center staff and students in the early childhood data system, which will align staff and students with k-12 data systems;
2. Setting a statutory September 1, 2014, start date for an early childhood longitudinal data system which will help the state measure the quality of early childhood programs; and
3. Establishing an Office of Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

Currently, only preschool children and their teachers in publicly subsidized programs, such as School Readiness, are required to be entered into the early childhood data system. Mandating that all day care centers must register in the early childhood data system will improve the quality

The universal preschool initiative has long-term positive implications for Connecticut's future. Low-income children who attend high quality preschools do better not just in school, but in life. Research shows that low-income preschool graduates are more likely to retain jobs, earn more money, and raise their children in supportive family settings than their peers who did not attend preschool.

CCER also encourages the passage of S.B. 26, "An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education" which expands the School Readiness program to include all of the Alliance Districts. The bill also increases the rates for both programs to encourage more full-day, high-quality programs for low-income children.

Of some concern to CCER is this: the bill narrowly defines universal preschool for low-income children to include only those low-income children who live in low-income communities. There are many low-income children who live outside of these communities who also need access to high-quality preschool experiences. CCER's estimates that about 6,500 children statewide do not have access to a high-quality preschool program. While the addition of 1,000 new slots is a terrific first step towards fulfilling unmet need, there still are about 5,500 low-income preschool children who need a high-quality preschool slot.

To address this, the bill also calls for the Office of Early Childhood to do a study about the unmet need of preschool slots for low-income children. CCER would suggest that it would be appropriate to consider adding all communities—rather than just low-income communities—in the study. In her recent testimony to the Appropriations Committee, Dr. Jones-Taylor, the Executive Director of the Office of Early Childhood, seemed positively inclined to such an approach.

Thank you for the opportunity to present before you today. Please let us know if we can provide you with any further information.